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ABSTRACT

The 1997 Utah Legislature mandated the development and administration of assessment of students' early reading and numeric skills so that these students' instructional needs might be better met. This document provides answers to several questions regarding Utah's pre-kindergarten and end-of-level kindergarten assessments. The questions include the following: (1) What are the Utah pre-kindergarten and end-of-level kindergarten assessments? (2) What are the security requirements? (3) What is the legal basis for these assessments? (4) What instruments are used for this program? (5) Does the pre-kindergarten assessment have to replace the assessment(s) the district has been using? (6) When are the assessments to be administered? (7) When and how should a child be exempted from taking these assessments? (8) What accommodations (other than primary language issues) are allowed for these assessments? (9) What is the role of parents in helping students acquire reading skills? (10) What constitutes the student's first Student Education Plan? (11) What is the district's obligation to commit Title I funds to assist in developing children's literacy skills? (12) What is the value of assessing kindergartners? (13) What are districts' and local boards' responsibilities in reviewing and using information provided by the assessments? and (14) Who is responsible for the assessments at the district level? (KB)

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Questions & Answers About Utah's Kindergarten Assessments

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT

THE UTAH PRE-KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENT AND END-OF-LEVEL KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENT FOR 1998-99

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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FOREWORD

The 1997 Utah Legislature enacted a law dealing with emerging and early reading skills. Specifically, this law mandates the development and administration of assessments of the students' reading and numeric skills so that parents and teachers may be better able to meet the instructional needs of these students.

"The legislature recognizes that well-developed reading skills help:

- *children to succeed in school, develop self-esteem, and build positive relationships with others;*
- *young adults to become independent learners; and*
- *adults to become and remain productive members of a rapidly changing technology-based society."*

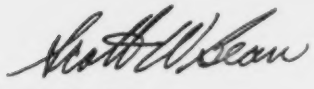
The Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments have been developed by the Utah State Office of Education in conjunction with representatives from school districts, teachers, professionals from higher education, and representatives of special populations. As indicated in the legislation, the assessments were developed so that data can be "collected, reviewed, and provided to school districts." This is done to:

- *"provide information to develop a personalized instructional program based on student needs;*
- *improve teacher inservice and preservice programs related to teaching reading and numeric skills; and*
- *evaluate the effectiveness of reading readiness for students entering the first grade."*

When using these instruments, however, teachers should remember that these and all other assessments are only a sample of student behavior and do not represent the entirety of the curriculum a student should receive. Overemphasis on assessment data may result in teachers, parents, day care providers, or others limiting their instruction or interaction with children to the content and format of the assessment. In so doing, students would be denied the breadth and depth of instruction and experience they should receive.

For the Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments, all assessment booklets, answer sheets, and other materials are provided by the Utah State Office of Education to local school districts and schools for administration. Likewise, the Utah State Office of Education bears all costs of scoring and reporting for these assessments.

The 1998 school year will be the first year of administration of the Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments in their final forms. We hope this information, along with the information provided in the other materials that accompany the assessments, will increase understanding of this literacy assessment program and will support the continuing effort of all Utah educators to provide a quality education to every student.



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State Superintendent
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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE UTAH PRE-KINDERGARTEN AND END-OF-LEVEL KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENTS FOR 1998-99

QUESTION: **What are the Utah Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments?**

ANSWER: The Utah Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments are brief, individually administered assessments given to each kindergarten child during the first two weeks of school and at the end of the kindergarten year. The purpose of the assessments is to help teachers begin to identify the literacy and numeracy skills each child has acquired before entering kindergarten, and when preparing to enter first grade, so that kindergarten and first grade teachers can:

- inform parents and other family members of things they can do to encourage development of good reading skills;
- plan instruction to meet the needs of the individuals and of the class; and
- individualize instruction to ensure that all students acquire the skills needed to move on to first grade.

Neither assessment is meant to be used as a screening instrument nor as a reason for excluding a child from kindergarten or first grade. Teachers should use the information on an individual and a group basis to start planning instruction to meet the specific needs of their students.

QUESTION: **What are the security requirements for the Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments?**

ANSWER: As with most assessment instruments, these instruments are to be kept secure. That is, they are ***not*** to be readily available to teachers, parents (including home-school parents), day care providers, or

others. They are to be used by public school teachers only at the designated times for purposes of conducting the assessments.

This and all other assessments are only a sample of student behavior and do not represent the entirety of the curriculum a student should receive. Overemphasis on assessment data may result in teachers, parents, day care providers, or others limiting their instruction or interaction with children to the content and format of the assessment. In so doing, students would be denied the breadth and depth of instruction and experience they should receive.

QUESTION: **What is the legal basis for the Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments?**

ANSWER: The 1997 Utah Legislature mandated the Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments by passage of Section 53A-3-402.9., Utah Code Annotated. This law mandates that *"as a part of the kindergarten student's first student education plan, the student's parent or guardian, the student, and kindergarten personnel at the student's school shall participate in an assessment of the student's reading and numeric skills."* In addition, the law mandates that assessment results be used to *". . . evaluate the effectiveness of reading readiness for students entering the first grade."*

QUESTION: **What instruments are used for this program?**

ANSWER: The legislation requires that *"the State Office of Education, in cooperation with the state's school districts, shall develop the assessment instrument[s] and any additional materials needed to implement and supplement the assessment program."* The instrument entitled ***KINDERGARTEN TIME*** has been developed for the Pre-Kindergarten Assessment. The End-of-Level Kindergarten instrument is entitled

KINDERGARTEN TIME II. Each instrument is accompanied by a handbook of instructions and materials to assist the teacher in analyzing and using the results.

QUESTION: **Does the Pre-Kindergarten Assessment have to replace the assessment(s) the district has been using?**

ANSWER: It is mandatory that all kindergarten children be given the Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments. Districts, schools, and/or teachers may use any other assessments as needed to further inform instructional practice as children enter kindergarten or at any other time during the school year.

QUESTION: **When are the Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments to be administered?**

ANSWER: The legislation allows for kindergarten classes to be suspended for up to ten days at the beginning and end of the school year to allow time for teachers to administer the Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments on an individual basis.

Administration of the assessment should be done during school rather than before the school year starts. For purposes of uniformity in administration, the **Pre-Kindergarten Assessment** should be given in the fall, not in the spring preceding the student's entrance into kindergarten. Districts may administer district-developed instruments, commercial instruments, or any other instrument of their choosing in the spring before children enter kindergarten to provide preliminary data to parents and teachers.

The **End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessment** is individually administered and should be given sometime within the last four weeks of

the school year. Districts may reserve some of the ten days set aside for assessment for individual administration of the End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessment. When planning allocation of those days, teachers and administrators should ensure that they have provided adequate time at the beginning of the year for teachers to administer the assessment, analyze the results, and use those results in planning instruction.

QUESTION: **What are the fiscal implications of excusing students during the first ten days of school?**

ANSWER: For fiscal purposes, the two-week period should be counted as if all kindergartners were in attendance. There are no fiscal consequences to districts as a result of kindergartners being in school ten days less than other students.

QUESTION: **Who has responsibility for administering and using results from the Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments?**

ANSWER: The assessments should be given by the regular teacher, meaning the teacher who has primary responsibility for the instruction of students. The teacher is then required to *"use the assessment in planning and developing an instructional program to meet the student's identified needs"* and to *"evaluate the effectiveness of reading readiness for students entering the first grade."* Districts need to ensure that **all kindergarten teachers** receive the necessary training to administer the assessments and to use the results in preparing instruction.

QUESTION: **When and how should a child be exempted from taking the Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments?**

ANSWER: With very few exceptions, every child should be able to participate in some way in the assessments. Most children should be able to take the assessments as written.

For children whose primary language is Spanish, a Spanish version of the Pre-Kindergarten Assessment has been developed. If instruction is delivered in a language other than English, teachers may choose to administer an assessment other than the End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessment that fits the instruction the student has received.

QUESTION: **When should the Pre-Kindergarten Assessment be given to a child in another language?**

ANSWER: If the child's primary language is one other than English, and if the child communicates more in the primary language than in English, an effort should be made to provide as much of the assessment in the primary language as possible. A Spanish version of the Pre-Kindergarten Assessment is available for students whose primary language is Spanish. For students whose primary language is something other than Spanish or English, teachers should adapt this assessment (e.g., provide a translation, provide further explanation of words or concepts the child has not understood, skip items that are not relevant to the structure of the student's native language) or administer any other assessment that will provide the most useful information about students' literacy development.

QUESTION: **What other accommodations (other than primary language issues) are allowed for the Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments?**

ANSWER: Teachers are encouraged to provide accommodations or modifications as needed to get useful information for children who cannot participate in the standard administration of either instrument. Assessment data for students who are accommodated, however, **should not** be aggregated for group reporting with that of students who took the assessment under standard conditions.

QUESTION: **What is the role of parents in helping students acquire reading skills?**

ANSWER: The legislation requires that *"the school provide the student's parent or guardian with appropriate resource materials to assist them at home in the student's literacy development."* Parents are children's first teachers, and their support is critical in the development of early literacy skills. Materials have been developed to help parents understand the results of the assessment and ways to support development of their student's fundamental literacy skills.

When the **Pre-Kindergarten Assessment** is given, it will likely be the student's first encounter with school and with the teacher, so the presence of a parent or other accompanying adult is expected. The parent or other accompanying adult also participates at the beginning of the assessment, as specified in the administration instructions, and it becomes the student's "first SEP."

The parent or other accompanying adult **should not** be present for the administration of the **End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessment**. If SEPs are conducted in conjunction with the administration of this

assessment, parents should be invited to wait elsewhere while the assessment is administered.

QUESTION: **What constitutes the student's "first SEP"?**

ANSWER: A Student Education Plan (SEP) is a conference where:

- parents can volunteer information about the child, including strengths, struggles, and interests;
- students can share what they know—which will be done mostly through the Pre-Kindergarten Assessment; and
- parent(s), teacher, and student can decide on some strategies or goals for accomplishing new learning throughout the year.

If the SEP has these elements, it will be complete, and the requirements for an SEP conference will be met.

QUESTION: **What is the district's obligation to commit Title I funds to assist in development of children's literacy skills?**

ANSWER: The legislation requires that *"in conjunction with the assessment program. . . school districts shall annually evaluate the need to use part of their Title I funds for preschool literacy programs."*

QUESTION: **What should be done about assessing students who enter kindergarten after the first two weeks of school?**

ANSWER: Students who enter kindergarten after the Pre-Kindergarten Assessment has been completed during the first two weeks of school should be assessed by teachers. These assessments, however, should not be sent in to the Utah State Office of Education for scoring.

QUESTION: **What is the value of assessing kindergarten children?**

ANSWER: These assessments provide uniform information about each student that can serve as the foundation for instruction to meet the individual

needs of students and of the class. The purpose of these assessments is to increase the information kindergarten and first grade teachers have as they begin school each year with a new class.

QUESTION: **What is the value of assessing kindergarten children with a standardized instrument?**

ANSWER: Administering an assessment in a standardized way allows aggregation of the results and reporting of group performance. The standardized administration is necessary in order to fulfill requirements of the legislation to *"collect, review, and provide to school districts the assessment data"* and use the results to *"provide information to develop a personalized instructional program. . .; improve teacher inservice and preservice programs. . .; [and] evaluate the effectiveness of reading readiness for students entering the first grade."* Standard administration of an instrument also provides more reliable and meaningful results that are less prone to error.

QUESTION: **What are the responsibilities of districts and local boards in reviewing and using the information provided by the Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments?**

ANSWER: The legislation indicates that *"the State Office of Education shall collect, review, and provide to school districts the assessment data generated . . . in order to:*

- *provide information to develop a personalized instructional program based on student needs;*
- *improve teacher inservice and preservice programs related to teaching reading and numeric skills; and*
- *evaluate the effectiveness of reading readiness for students entering the first grade.*

Each board shall provide for district evaluation of the assessment results and use the evaluations in setting goals and establishing programs for the district and schools within the district."

QUESTION: **Who is responsible for the Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments at the district level?**

ANSWER: Each district has identified a testing director who is responsible for coordinating the Pre-Kindergarten and End-of-Level Kindergarten Assessments at the district level. A listing of district testing directors can be found at the end of this document.

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